
Irish Association of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Statement on Road Traffic Injuries in Ireland

Our colleagues in the Irish Association of Emergency Medicine have rightly highlighted the ongoing death toll on Irish roads and the urgent measures needed to address it. The Irish Association of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (IAPRM) wishes to highlight another aspect of road trauma that receives far less public attention: serious injury and long-term disability.

While road fatalities are rightly reported and discussed, thousands of people each year survive road traffic collisions but are left with life-changing injuries requiring prolonged hospitalisation, rehabilitation, and ongoing medical and social support.

According to Road Safety Authority (RSA) data, more than 11,000 people were hospitalised following road traffic collisions in Ireland between 2020 and 2024, while An Garda Síochána recorded more than 7,400 serious injuries over the same period.

Road traffic collisions are a major cause of acquired disability worldwide. The World Health Organization estimates that between 20 and 50 million people globally sustain non-fatal road traffic injuries each year, many resulting in long-term disability, chronic pain, cognitive impairment, or psychological trauma.

These injuries are often devastating. Patients may sustain traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, amputations, complex orthopaedic trauma, chronic pain syndromes, and severe psychological trauma. Even moderate injuries can result in persistent cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and vocational impairment.

Road traffic injuries can instantly alter the course of a person's life. Patients may face months or years of rehabilitation, loss of independence, inability to return to work or education, financial hardship, and profound impacts on mental health and family life. Families frequently become long-term carers overnight.

As physicians working in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, we see firsthand the lifelong consequences of these injuries. We work with patients long after the headlines fade — during inpatient rehabilitation, community reintegration, and adaptation to permanent disability. Behind every serious injury statistic is a person, a family, and a future profoundly altered.

Serious road injury represents a hidden epidemic of disability. While mortality statistics remain critically important, non-fatal injuries account for a substantial proportion of long-term disability arising from trauma, particularly among younger working-age adults.

The scale of serious injury on Irish roads demands the same level of urgency and political attention as road fatalities. Between 2019 and 2023, RSA data recorded over 2,350 drivers and more than 1,400 pedestrians seriously injured on Irish roads. Pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, children, and older adults remain particularly vulnerable.

Beyond the human consequences, serious road injuries also impose major economic costs through emergency care, surgery, intensive care, rehabilitation, disability supports, productivity loss, and

informal caregiving. European estimates suggest that road collisions account for socioeconomic costs equivalent to approximately 2% of GDP annually.

Many survivors require specialist interdisciplinary rehabilitation, including neurorehabilitation, prosthetic rehabilitation, pain management, vocational rehabilitation, and long-term community supports. Delays in rehabilitation are associated with poorer outcomes, prolonged hospital stays, and increased long-term dependency. Despite recent developments, Ireland continues to experience among the longest waits in Europe for specialist inpatient rehabilitation.

International evidence consistently demonstrates that reductions in vehicle speed, safer road design, segregated active travel infrastructure, seatbelt use, and strong enforcement of drink- and drug-driving laws significantly reduce both deaths and serious injuries.

The IAPRM calls on Government and all political representatives to treat road trauma as a major public health issue and to prioritise evidence-based measures including:

- Sustained investment in road safety infrastructure and safer road design
- Increased road policing and enforcement
- Expansion of automated speed enforcement
- Implementation of a speed limit of 30km/h in all built up areas and enforcement of speed limits
- Improved active travel infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists
- Enhanced national data collection on serious injuries and long-term disability
- Investment in rehabilitation services to ensure timely access to specialist inpatient and community rehabilitation care

Serious road injuries are not inevitable “accidents”; they are largely preventable events. Ireland has committed to Vision Zero — the elimination of road deaths and serious injuries. Achieving this goal will require sustained political leadership, investment, enforcement, and recognition that preventing serious injury is as important as preventing death.

The human cost of road trauma extends far beyond mortality figures alone. Every serious injury prevented represents a life preserved, a family spared trauma, and a future protected.

The Irish Association of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine urges Government to place road safety, injury prevention, and rehabilitation services at the centre of national public health policy.



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